

Daniel P. Vrakas
County Executive



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Learn About Fall Prevention This Autumn

Waukesha, WIS. – Waukesha County’s Senior Care Review Team is leading the charge throughout the area in educating seniors, their caregivers and healthcare practitioners on how to prevent unintentional falls this Autumn.

County Executive Dan Vrakas explains, “By working with public and private sector partners that are committed to improving the quality of life for older adults, our Senior Care Review Team has been instrumental in reducing the rate of unintentional falls in their homes and at residential care facilities. I would like to thank all the organizations that come together on a regular basis to share information so that best practices can be developed and implemented to keep our senior citizens safe and healthy.”

Unintentional falls are a significant cause of injury in all ages of the U.S. population. One third of people over the age of 65 years fall every year, 10% of which are serious enough to require hospitalization. Every 18 seconds, an older adult receives treatment in an emergency department for a fall, and every 35 minutes someone in this population dies because of their injuries.

At twice the national average, Wisconsin has one of the highest death rates from unintentional falls in the country. Annually, fall related hospitalizations and emergency department visits result in over \$350 million in charges across the state, 90% of which is paid for by Medicare.

Waukesha County’s rate of fatal falls, or deaths per 100,000 in population, is 1.5 times that of the state of Wisconsin’s rate as a whole. Since the review team’s inception in 2001, Waukesha County’s number of fatal falls in nursing homes has decreased by 32%, and fatal falls due to complications of hip fractures in nursing homes has decreased by 50%.

Medical Examiner Dr. Lynda Biedrzycki says, “Fatal falls in Waukesha County nursing homes have declined due to the efforts of Waukesha County’s Senior Care Review Team. Its success is based on identifying risk factors and implementing effective preventive measures that directly benefit our community.”

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“Learn About Fall Prevention This Autumn,” *continued...*

“I have been honored to be a member of Waukesha County’s Senior Care Review Team since its beginning. Due to the multi-agency approach that involves evaluating, reviewing and disseminating of fall and injury data, the prevalence of falls and injuries have dramatically decreased in area nursing homes,” announces Brookfield Rehabilitation & Specialty Care Administrator DJ Swant, NHA, CSW.

Falls are not an inevitable part of aging. Here are four proven strategies that can reduce or prevent falls and help older adults live better and longer:

1. Begin a regular exercise program with guidance from a doctor to improve balance and coordination.
2. Have your healthcare provider review prescribed and over-the-counter medicine interactions and side effects to minimize sleepiness and dizziness.
3. Have your vision checked by a doctor annually.
4. Make your home safer by: removing items that can be tripped over; keeping frequently used items in close reach; installing grab bars and non-slip mats in bathrooms; improving lighting; and wearing shoes inside and outside the home.

“Falls and broken bones resulting from accidents at home greatly decrease independence and often lead to institutionalization or even death. A person can cut these risks in half by making simple changes to the inside of the home and being more cautious in deciding what they are physically able to do,” shares Aging & Disability Resource Center Specialist Judie Berthelsen, CIRS, RN.

“Carroll University’s Physical Therapy department works with the Medical Examiner’s office to collect and analyze data for the team to determine why falls in older adults lead to fatalities in Waukesha County. The goal of this collaboration is to determine which variables, before or after a fall, are predictive of mortality. Our university and our students are so pleased to be a part of this important initiative that is dedicated to improving senior citizen health outcomes,” states Dr. Sara Deprey, assistant physical therapy professor at Carroll University.

Coordinated jointly by the Medical Examiner’s and District Attorney’s offices, Waukesha County’s Senior Care Review Team is a multi-disciplinary effort that brings together public and private sector partners to evaluate senior care and their living situations to identify areas of potential abuse or hazards that result in premature death or injury. Membership includes representatives from: the Medical Examiner’s office, District Attorney’s office, the Aging & Disability Resource Center, the department of Health & Human Services, nursing homes and assisted care facilities, hospitals and clinics, higher education institutions, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, State legislators, and law enforcement personnel.

Senior care advocates that are interested in learning more about Waukesha County’s Senior Care Review Team should contact the Medical Examiner’s office at (262) 548-7575. For more information on preventing unintentional falls, the public is encouraged to call Waukesha County’s Aging & Disability Resource Center at (262) 548-7848 or Toll Free at 1-866-677-ADRC (2372).

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